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Case Western Reserve University, "Newsletter: The Center for Professional Ethics, Summer 1987."
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The Center for Professional Ethics **NEWSLETTER**

at Case Western Reserve University

THE CENTER'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IS PLANNING THE FALL 1987 PROGRAM

Several meetings have been devoted to the evaluation of this past year's program and planning for the coming year. At this time in the Center's history, it is clear that our Monday Evening Dialogue Forums provide the most significant opportunity for us to serve our membership. Where we are at this point in our planning of the Dialogue Forums, plus several other program activities, is described below.

MONDAY EVENING DIALOGUE FORUMS

The dates for the Monday Evening Dialogue Forums are:

September 14
September 28

October 12
October 26

November 9
November 23

Several of the Monday evenings will remain unplanned so that news-breaking issues can be responded to. Areas of concern to the Center, some of which will be programmed, are: The Ways of Ethical Decision-Making in Other Societies; Are the Professions Defining the Cultural Norms?; Individualism, Community and the U.S. Constitution; Ethical Issues Involved in University Research; The Patenting of Life; and Ethics and Journalism.

The Forums will be held from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. in Thwing Center. The format will be a speaker followed by response and discussion. The specific programs will be listed in the September issue of the Newsletter.

"SYSTEMS OF ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING"

This Seminar will be held on Saturday morning, September 26, 1987, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. The location in University Circle will be announced. The Seminar begins with a description of the centrality of morality and one's moral foundation as the ground on which ethical decisions are made. The nature of "duty" and "ends" ethics are then described, after which several case studies are explored by the Seminar members. Insofar as possible, cases will be drawn from the interests of those present. This short-course on ethical decision-making has proved helpful in providing a base for clearer decision-making, especially in the more difficult ethical situations faced today by so many professionals.

SIX-WEEK STUDY GROUP ON ETHICS

If enough people are interested, an informal six-week study group will be held using the book, Ethics: Theory and Practice, by Jacques P. Thiroux. The group will meet once a week. It is our intention to keep the group informal and conversational, using the book more as a resource than a text. The September Newsletter will provide an opportunity for you to indicate your interest in such a group.

We hope these programs will be of real interest to our membership and that you will put the dates for the Monday Evening Dialogue Forums in your datebook now.

Nursing Ethics

by Barbara J. Daly

Barbara J. Daly, RN, MSN, FAAN, is the Assistant Clinical Professor of Nursing at the CWRU Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing and Assistant Director of Nursing at University Hospitals. She is a member of the faculty team which is teaching the Course, "Ethics and The Professions", which includes the Schools of Nursing, Medicine, Law and Social Sciences. We appreciate her contribution to our series of Ethics and the Professions.

In writing on "nursing ethics", one must first address the question — what is nursing ethics? Does this refer to (1) the application of traditional, general principles of ethics to dilemmas faced by nurses; (2) a set of ethical principles accepted by nurses as governing their behavior; (3) a specific set of rules designed to address the specific duties and responsibilities held by nurses?

The answer, of course, is that nursing is comprised of all of these in some way. Nurses, like all individuals, have an obligation to adhere to general ethical principles of right conduct. This imposes duties such as truth telling and the keeping of promises. Thus any discussion of "nursing ethics" must be founded on a recognition and analysis of the most important basic principles. As professionals, nurses also have duties of station, related to their relationship with their patients or clients. Like any other professional, be it physician, lawyer, minister, or social worker, the nurse enters into a special relationship that entails formalized general duties, which are most clearly prescribed by the Code of Ethics, as well as the specific expectations of individual patients. Lastly, there are some unique features of the nursing role, particularly that of the largest group of nurses, those employed in hospitals. It is in this role that nurses most often experience dilemmas which stem from multiple conflicting responsibilities towards patients, towards employers, and towards other professionals.

The ethical dilemmas nurses face stem from all of these sources. They are demonstrated both intrapersonally and interpersonally in debates regarding such issues as establishing the correct hierarchy of goods (such as truth telling, prevention of harm, keeping of promises), recognizing valid grounds for limitations of obligations (such as excessive burden to the professional or the violation of the professional's moral code), and resolving the situation of conflicting or overriding obligations. The challenge facing nurses today is to understand and respond to these many sources of conflict in a thoughtful, reasoned fashion.

In recent years the increased attention paid by both the professional and the public to the ethical aspects of health care has been associated with a like increase in the amount of attention paid to the origins of ethical problems faced by nurses. Many students of nursing ethics identify the most troublesome dilemmas as those stemming from the unique position of the nurse as both professional, with its connotation of authority and primary obligation to the patient, and employee, with strong obligation to the employing organization. In addition, in today's complex health care settings, the nurse has obligations towards other health team members. The relationship with each of these parties (patients, organizations and other professionals) imposes obligations which may be, and frequently are, in conflict with each other. Thus, it is suggested, the stage is set for virtually constant conflict.

While it is true that this situation does create the potential for conflict, some of the assumptions contained within it bear further analysis. First, is this situation really unique to nurses? At one point in history this was probably true, but consider modern health care. Physicians have allegiances to corporations, to institutions which more commonly employ them, to their professional association, to their patients. Are they any less burdened or obligated to many masters than the nurse? Social workers too, have professional groups, accrediting bodies, institutional employers, and primary

relationship with clients. The danger in overemphasizing this as a unique characteristic of nursing is a too-easy acceptance of the inevitability of conflict, which in turn may lead to inadequate attention to the general consideration of how any professional should respond to this conflict. This may be associated with missing the opportunity to work with these other professionals in addressing common conflicts. Even more troublesome, it may precipitate conflict in the work place as we perceive ourselves to be "the only ones" who face this situation:

This conviction, that the situation facing nurses is at the heart of the most significant dilemmas, tends to make us focus most of our attention on what is only one aspect of nursing ethics, albeit a major one. Much more important is the teaching of fundamental philosophical principles to our students, assisting practitioners in the application of these principles in particular situations, and investigation of useful procedures for ethical injury in clinical settings. The potential for conflict will always exist. What is alterable is the ability of our practitioners to choose reasoned courses of action based on sound thinking.

The challenge for nursing educators is to instill in our students an appreciation of the importance of the ethical traditions of nursing and the encouragement of the struggle to establish a personal ethical code. Nursing managers, whether in hospitals or other agencies, must address the organizational conditions which can foster on-going discussions of these dilemmas and support all practitioners in their attempts to resolve them. More specifically, courses in moral philosophy and current ethical problems, the opportunity for interprofessional dialogues, and exposure to clinicians addressing real life problems can all assist students in developing the questioning attitudes and reasoning skills they will need. In the hospital setting, the availability of Ethics Committees, ethics rounds, and relevant continuing education activities accomplishes two things. It provides a real source of guidance for practitioners and it conveys a clear message regarding the importance of addressing these issues. Most importantly, all of these approaches can be successful in assuring that we begin to match our advances in technology with equal growth in philosophy.

Remember These Numbers

368-5349

368-2667

The Center goes on "summer schedule" from July 1st to August 10th. Co-Director Bob Lawry will be on duty while Kim Diemert and Bob Clarke are away. 368-5349 is the Center's phone and messages you leave on the answering machine will be picked up promptly. Or call Bob Lawry's office directly at 368-2667 to reach him or his secretary who goes by "T.J." Please use these numbers; we do want to keep in touch with you.

129 Yost Hall—Case Western Reserve University—(216) 368-5349

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for Professional
Ethics**
at Case Western Reserve University

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